



NAVAL DEFENCE

St. Andrew's Society Banquet

Colonel GEORGE T. DENISON'S

Reply to the Toast of

ARMY AND NAVY

30th November, 1909

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The Naval and Military Forces of the Empire.

For when ye sing brave "Scots Wha Hae,"

Or "Hundred Pipers" won the fray,

We feel like fechten' nicht an' day

Wi' man or de'il.

Colonel Denison, in responding, said.—I had great pleasure in accepting the invitation to attend this dinner and I was asked to make a few remarks in reference to the naval defence of our Empire. I accepted that invitation because I think that never in all our history was there a time when every man in this country should more be thinking and considering and judging for himself what is the best for Canada and for our Empire. (Hear, hear.) We ought to carefully consider our position, and I am very much afraid that many of us are so engaged in our ordinary business, and have so much to do in trying to carry on those affairs with which we are connected, that we may not have sufficient time or opportunity to study carefully and to look into the future and to

see what is the best thing in the interests of a country. Now, in the first place, I hope you will bear with me in the few remarks I want to make. I want to draw your attention to the fact that this country of ours has without doubt the very greatest possibilities of any country on the face of the globe. (Hear, hear and applause.) Just remember that we are in the same latitude as all the great nations of Europe; we have a country as large as all of Europe north of the latitude of Rome, and in the same latitude. We have agricultural resources without limit; we have mineral resources; we have resources of every kind; we have a country capable of maintaining a population of about 150,000,000, and we have scattered now in it a sparse population of 7,000,000—a good many Scotchmen, thank God. (Applause.) Now, consider what that means. Here are great powers growing up in Europe, with the great nations that have fleets and armies looking about for opportunities of expansion, looking for new countries in order to spread their people and their power and their posts; I ask you if in all the world there is any country more calculated to excite the cupidity of those nations that have power than Canada? (No.) Now, that is the position that we are in; and why are we a free people to-day? Why are we to-day carrying on business and building railroads spreading through our country, doing everything we can to in-

crease its wealth and prosperity! Because we are under the protection of the navy of Great Britain. (Hear, hear.) Because we have behind us the power of that great Empire. If it were not for that we would at once begin to see whether we would have the comfortable, easy, safe, secure concition of affairs under which we are so flourishing to-day. Now, make no mistake about that. Remember that from the very beginning this country has excited the cupidity of our neighbors to the south. They came up in 1775 to conquer, and they tried in 1812-13-14 to do the same thing. Thanks to the power of the Empire, thanks to the protecting care of our mother country, and thanks also to the splendid efforts of our own people individually for their freedom in this country—we have been able to hold our own. But do we not see now that other nations—the United States themselves have tried other methods, to induce us into their ranks. We know that even Japan is casting covetous eyes upon our western Provinces; and, gentlemen, if Germany should get on top, there is no place in all the world more calculated to excite her cupidity than this very country of Canada (Hear, hear) Now, if that is the case, where does our safety lie? It consists in standing by the Empire that has always stood by us (Hear, hear) It depends upon our being willing to do all in our power to help the strength of that Empire under which alone we can

be safe and secure (Hear, hear) That being the case, let us see if there is any danger menacing us at this moment. Germany to-day is the master nation in Europe. She is absolutely in control in that country. She was able not very long ago to cause and to compel France to dismiss her Foreign Minister. Shortly after, only a very short time ago, in that affair with Austria and Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Russia was going to do something to help those smaller countries. The Emperor William put two or three army corps on his eastern frontier, and Russia backed down. He was able to make Russia do as he liked. France is on the watch all the time, afraid of another war with Germany. Now, people may think that war of that sort might not be successful, but I want to carry your minds back just about one hundred years. There are people alive to-day that were alive then—(laughter)—and a hundred years ago, that is a very short time in the history of nations—think of what was the condition in Europe. Napoleon was the absolute master of all Europe. He was the Sovereign of France. He had one brother King of Spain, another King of Holland, another King of Westphalia; he had his Marshals in every position through Europe. Murat, his brother-in-law, was King of Naples; Bernadotte, one of his Marshals, was the Crown Prince of Sweden; and, remember, gentlemen, that Austria and Prussia were under his

hand. And when he went to Russia in 1812 he had Spaniards and Italians and Germans and Prussians and Dutch and every other nation. (A voice—"Scotch?") No, he did not have Scotch. (Laughter.) No, they knew him too well; that is one place where the Scotch kept out. (Laughter.) Perhaps if he had had some Scotch when he went to Moscow he might not have suffered so badly. (Laughter.) But just think of that—there were Dutch regiments, if not in the French army, under French flags, that fought all the way to Moscow and suffered enormous losses, and hundreds and thousands of the people of Europe that were not Frenchmen, that did not belong to France, were forced by that dominant power to fight their battles. Now, then, suppose Germany should get the upper hand with her four millions of soldiers, she could conquer all Europe were it but for the British fleet.

And the Emperor knows that, and, seventeen or eighteen years ago he told his people: "I must have an overpowering navy, or Germany can never occupy the position she should among the nations of the world"; and he has gone on with gigantic strides to build up an enormous navy. Why does he want that if it is not to struggle with England for the mastery of the sea? How is it that he has been building Dreadnoughts just as fast as ever he can do it? Within the last two years he has increased from two or

three slips capable of building large war vessels, to seventeen. In this last year they have added 38,000 men to the Krupp works at Essen, in order to be able to make all the guns and the equipment necessary for those great battle ships. What has been done since this discussion in the English House of Commons? Austria is building eight great Dreadnoughts. Do you mean to tell me those Dreadnoughts will not be ready to fall into rank against our Empire? Of course they will. And as another proof of the extraordinary danger of the present state of affairs, I just ask you to remember this one thing, that last March the Premier of England, Mr. Asquith, and three or four of his leading Ministers, backed by the leaders of the Opposition, all struck the note of alarm and said that something must be done to try and save the present condition of affairs. Now, if they were all alarmed then, I want to ask any of you what change has taken place since? Are we one single whit safer to-day then we were then when that cry was raised, when the danger was thought so great that the British Government called her people from the ends of the earth to London to have a conference and see what should be done? Has there been any change yet? Are we any stronger? What have we done? We have simply talked. (No, no.) There has been practically nothing done yet. I am glad to say that our Government are going to try to do something now;

but I want to say openly and plainly as a military man that if we want to do anything that is to be of any service for our Empire, we want to have Canadian ships of the very best and finest class that can be built. (Applause.) We want to pay for them. (Applause.) We want to try and man them as well as we can. (Loud applause.) And when the great battle comes that will settle the whole thing, I want to see our ships in the front line alongside of our British men-of-war. (Applause.) I want as many Canadian men there, too, as we can get; but remember, it takes a long time to train men to command Dreadnoughts. I tell you, gentlemen, that anybody who has studied military history will know that these things are settled not in a year, or two years, or three years; they are settled in an hour or two hours. At the battle of Aegospotami the Athenians, who at that time occupied the position in the ancient world that England does to-day—Athens was absolutely the mistress of the seas, and she was not only that, but she was at the top of the world in everything—in literature, science, arts, in everything—she had the greatest fleet in the world, and yet, in one fight, through one little accidental mistake of her officials at the battle of Aegospotami, she was defeated, and she went down, and she has never risen since. That was in 405 B.C. I don't believe that the real fight of Trafalgar lasted more than three or four hours, and then it was set-

tled, and then England got on top in 1805, and from that day to this we have been able to sing: "Britons never shall be slaves." (Hear, hear.) But we have got to remember that when this thing is settled, it is not going to be settled by ships built in Canada, nor is it going to be settled by ships in the harbors of our eastern coast that are waiting there till the thing is decided. That will do no good. That is not strategy. It is not common sense. The fact of the matter is, when the fight comes, if we are spending any money we must put it in some place where it will do the greatest service. I hope that our Government will consider these things. They ought to be able to see them as well as I can, or as well as any other military man can. They ought to be able to get skilled advice. They ought to be able to get authoritative information, and, gentlemen, if you look at the report of the conference in London, you will find they got the information. The British Admiralty told them that if they did not want to put money into the British fleet, it would be the very best to have one fleet, and have it altogether. If we did not want to do that, and wanted to have fleets of our own—and I must say I like that idea best—because whatever we do have it ought to be Canadian—(hear, hear)—but they gave this advice to the Commission. They said: "If the colonies want to establish fleets of their own they should establish fleet units, and in making these fleet

units, the Indomitable or Indefatigable, which is a cruiser of the Dreadnought type, was an essential part of each fleet unit, and the part that ought to be built first. Then they ought to have cruisers of the Bristol type, and torpedo boats and destroyers." The Government have not made their report yet, but I hope that what we see in the papers is not true, and that when they do come to do anything, they will follow the advice of the best authority given in England, and build the essential part, and build it at once—hear, hear—and that they won't leave that and do something that is not essential and that need not be done for some time. Now, I hope that that will be the case, because none of you know exactly what might happen if this war went against us. If the fight took place in the North Sea, and we were defeated—which God forbid—but suppose such a thing should happen, and suppose it happened because the colonies had their vessels all at home and did not have them where they were wanted—what would happen then? England in the time of Nelson was able to feed herself. She grew enough grain to feed herself. Now she requires 30,000,000 quarters of wheat, and she grows about six—hardly that sometimes—and if the Germans got on top, without even sending an army over they could cut off her food and make her surrender. If she surrendered, and we had a fleet here, we would have to give it

up. If Germany wanted Canada as a colony—and they say that the lack of colonies is the reason she is going into all this great expenditure — what would there be to save us ? She has got four millions of men. We don't want her to come over here and put a million men in here. Some people speak about depending on the Monroe doctrine. If England goes under, if the British fleet is defeated, if she has to be under the foot of Germany, and has to give over every warship she has got to Germany. I tell you that the United States would talk very little about the Monroe doctrine. (Hear, hear.) Would the twelve millions of Germans in the United States vote for fighting a great, powerful nation that had become victorious, in order to save us ? Would the twelve millions of negroes do it ? Would the ten millions of Irish, who came to take us once, want to fight Germany in order to save us ? Why, the thing is ridiculous. I don't believe that they would dream of attempting to fight for us, particularly if the Germans had both the British fleet and their own. Then, again, if they did, would we be a free people any longer ? Would we be willing to put ourselves in that position, to depend upon the United States for our safety ? Why, they would gobble us up, and we would have to go in with them, and if so we would lose our nationality. As far as I am concerned, then I would have no country ;

we would have no country; we would either be with the United States or Germany—and I think of the two I would rather take Germany. (Great laughter.) Now, it is just as well for us Canadians to think over all these things. (Hear, hear.) If the battle went against us we would turn around and say to our politicians, "Why didn't you double your national debt and build ships and save us? You are the people that should have thought it out. You are the people that should have looked ahead. You are the people that should have made the preparation." And I think that we would all of us feel that our politicians had been too timid, and that if they had come out boldly and asked the people of Canada to put their hands in their pockets and to pledge their credit and put debts upon their posterity in order to secure freedom for their posterity, I believe that the people of this country would be satisfied. (Hear, hear.) But we have always had to fight against the timidity of our politicians. I remember forty odd years ago, when we wanted to get the Northwest Territories into this country. I can remember as a young man then belonging to the Canada First party, the tremendous fight that we had to get that in. We were told that \$1,500,000 was too much to give for a country that was no use for anything except bringing up fur-bearing animals. We were told that the country never would be any good, that we would

never be able to govern it, and so on. I want to ask you if there is any man to day who would say that the people at that time paid too much money for that great country ? (No.) One million five hundred thousand dollars, and yet there was a rebellion up there ; we had to fight and hold meetings and talk ; we had to appeal to the people to try and drive the Government to send an expedition up there, so that we could get that country into Canada. Would we give that country up to-day for a thousand millions of dollars ? (No.) A few years ago our politicians were too timid to spend a little money to get Newfoundland, and it has never come in. Some day we will regret that, and I hope, for God's sake, that we will not have to regret that we did not have rulers with foresight enough and with pluck enough to do what is necessary in order to secure the safety of our country. (Loud applause.)

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